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SUBJECT: CRIME SYNOPSIS FOR HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

The crime environment in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) remains at a significant level. Petty crime is prevalent in all areas of Ho Chi Minh City. The most common modus-operandi is for thieves to utilize motorbikes in their assaults. Cell phones and purses are routinely snatched by motorbike bandits without regard to the individual victims. Case in point, several women with infants had their purses snatched by motorbike bandits directly outside one of the primary U.S. diplomatic residential housing compounds while carrying their infants or pushing a baby-stroller. Petty thieves do target expats and foreign tourists simply due to tourist complacency and perceived value of expat's personal belongings. That said, the Consulate's Locally Engaged Staff (LES) employees are not immune from these criminal acts. In the past 3 months, LES staff have reported 5 cell phone thefts and two home robberies. The most recent Consulate employee theft occurred on 12/6/08. An American employee had her purse snatched by a motor-bike bandit in broad-daylight while touring in the popular Cholon area of HCMC.

A developing trend worth reporting is the emergence of organized gangs of petty criminals. RSO has received several reports over the past 3 months regarding organized criminal elements that persuade tourists and expats to go to either Vietnamese residences or restaurants and then they are eventually robbed. The first type of activity involves naive tourists being lured to a local Vietnamese residence for traditional tea or a simple card-game. Once arriving at the residence, the tourists are robbed and often beaten if they do not obey the demands of their captors. RSO received first-hand information from a local clinic that several Japanese tourists were treated for injuries received during an assault after being lured to a local residence for tea. The second type of activity involves tourists being lured to local restaurants by tour guides. Yesterday, a major Ho Chi Minh City newspaper published an article regarding the Vietnamese police arresting members of a local gang who targeted unsuspecting foreign tourists and expats. The gang's ring leader allegedly posed as a local tour guide and lured expats to restaurants. Upon arriving at the restaurant, the expats were approached by young woman for conversation and drinks and the restaurant owner would then inflate the bills. Two expats were charged over \$1200 for food, drinks, and entertainment, and when they could not pay, they were overpowered by the local Vietnamese gang members, and forced to go to ATM and withdraw money to cover the inflated bills. Police investigated the scam over a two week period, and then arrested the restaurant owner, ringleader and gang members. The ring leader has confessed to 23 separate incidents.

RSO will continue a stringent briefing program and report all incidents to the local authorities. Furthermore, though home burglaries have not occurred recently in Post provided residences, RSO continues to evaluate the residential security requirements due to home burglaries in the immediate vicinity of Post-provided housing compounds.

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